

Tech Topics

One-to-One Computing and Teacher Growth

By Gary Stager

2012 marks my 30th anniversary of helping educators make sense of the wondrous learning opportunities afforded by microcomputers.

In 1990, I led professional development (PD) in the world's first two "laptop schools." In the intervening years, I have helped countless independent, public, and international schools embrace 1:1 computing; most recently at Chadwick International School, where we launched one laptop per child beginning in Grade 1.

Along the way, I have learned many lessons about successful implementation, sustaining innovation, and getting a return on investment worthy of the children you serve.

Too many schools employ teachers who are the last adults in the solar system incapable of using a word processor or web browser. Aside from a clinical diagnosis, the only plausible hypothesis is that scarcity is a major obstacle to use. In many schools, students are able to use a computer for minutes per week. That all changes when each child has a personal laptop capable of serving as a recording studio, science lab,

writer's workshop, robotics facility, atelier, and "Mathland," with them anytime and anywhere.

Computers make a wider, deeper range of projects possible than ever before and here are a few tips for effective professional development.

Dream bigger

Some educators are excited by using computers to teach the same things we have always wanted students to learn, perhaps with greater efficiency or comprehension. My work is driven by children using computers to learn and do things unimaginable just a few years ago. Professional development should be focused on helping learners be mathematicians, authors, filmmakers, composers, and engineers. Sustained PD should be accompanied by faculty-wide reading of visionary literature supporting that shift in practice. Email me for a suggested reading list.

Do not predict—reflect

Rather than pretending to have a crystal ball and creating a modest plan, set high expectations and create rituals during which teachers share examples of progress. Your school may then make course corrections. **... continued on p. 28**

Differentiate Yourself!

By Tony DePrato

Here is the situation: you are stuck in an elevator. There is a dim emergency light on. The circulation fan is off, and the power seems to be lost. You grab the handy emergency phone. A voice comes on: "Hello, this is Captain Smith of the City Fire Department. The computer controlling your elevator has stopped responding. It will take us two to three hours to free you; you may run out of air before that. However, there is another way. We can talk you through the process of rebooting the elevator. It should take about 20 minutes to complete."

Do you say to the fireman, "Sorry, I am a visual learner?" I bet 99 percent of people would listen up, and do their best to reboot the elevator.

If you listen carefully when people list reasons they cannot learn, it is always because some mystical ingredient is missing. You might have a chemistry text book, but they need a video series. You might have a video series, but they need it to be interactive. Whatever "it" is, it is an excuse.

Based on our individual personalities and physiology, we can of course "learn better" if the situation suits us perfectly—but in real life, how often does that happen? And when the

stakes are high and we need to make decisions, do we stop and ask for the information to be re-presented to us in a way that we prefer? No.

So why is it that every time I have a meeting or go to a seminar, people keep claiming they need customization, and that the presenter of the information needs to create it?

We all are seeing a trend in education where teachers are being asked to customize every lesson on a per child basis. Not only is this impossible, it destroys the learning process; the process and experience of learning are more important than the content. So how does educational technology factor into this? Technology can not only make it possible for everyone to control their learning, but it can also give each person the responsibility of sorting out their own idiosyncrasies.

Instead of one person trying to please multiple groups of 15-30 people, the one person should be able to show each group different ways to approach learning. In a very natural way, each person in the group will then migrate to the solutions that are best for them. Some people will, for various annoying reasons, keep their practice very cumbersome. This is when the facilitator has to step in and influence the learning choices.

Notice, I am not saying "teacher" and "student." I am avoiding these terms because learning methodology should apply to everyone in situations involving learning. Adults and children are physiologically different, and thus appear to be different types of learners. However, all human beings follow the same series when learning: trial, error, trial, error. The more tries someone attempts, the better their chances.

Technology needs to be seen and used as a tool, not a solution. The most important thing a school can do is make sure that everyone in the community has equal access to varying types of resources. Educational leaders, stop dictating that teachers customize learning for each student! Asking one person to micromanage 120 people is not going to work, and does not work in any other field.

What works is teaching those people who are facilitating learning to distribute learning techniques that allow individual participants to customize their experience. When we distribute, we enable opportunity. Everything else is just filling in the gaps, inefficiency, and frustration. ●

Visit Mr. DePrato at <http://www.tonydeprato.com>.



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tions or amplify examples of innovation. An action research approach to reflective practice will lead to transformation impossible to predict.

Change everything

Possibly, 1:1 computing may produce the catalytic effect necessary for making classrooms more learner-centered and project-based. School leadership needs to be nimble enough to make the changes in curriculum, assessment, scheduling, pedagogy, and even architecture inspired by ubiquitous personal computing.

Work on teachers' turf

One reason traditional professional development "does not work" is because the teaching is outside the context of the practice. Some of my most rewarding and enduring work has been in schools where I mentored teachers in their classrooms, with their students. Teachers are inspired to learn more when they see

the possibilities through the eyes and screens of their students.

My role is to model best practices and to show how computers may be used as intellectual laboratories or vehicles for self-expression, which amplify human potential and challenge the status quo. I become a trusted confidant, who helps teachers identify student talent.

Do unto ourselves...

Since knowledge follows from experience, professional development must be focused on using computers in the ways valued for students. PD resources need to be spent on benefiting students, and helping teachers understand what it feels like to learn with computers.

Teachers need the luxury of uninterrupted learning in a rich, creative context. Off-site, immersive "slumber parties" have proven effective for schools with the resources to host their own events. Other schools send teams of teachers to my Constructing Modern Knowledge summer institute. ●

Visit Dr. Stager at <http://www.constructingmodernknowledge.com>.

Helping Those Whose Needs We Cannot Meet

Part four: residential treatment centers

Special advertiser content

By Richard Detwiler

This article is the fourth in a series describing residential program options in the United States for students who are not succeeding in their international school. Earlier this year I described traditional boarding schools (October 2011), wilderness programs (December 2011), and therapeutic boarding schools (February 2012). In this issue of *The International Educator*, we turn to residential treatment centers (RTCs).

Residential treatment centers serve troubled children overcoming deep behavioral, emotional, mental, and/or psychological problems. The typical RTC program provides the broadest range of interventions, including psychiatric care, specialized counseling, behavioral therapies, and academic support.

RTCs are designed to treat teens presenting with serious, complex issues: self-destructive behaviors, raging defiance, addictions, mood dis-

orders, trauma, social impairment, insecure attachment, etc., coupled with academic underachievement. Therapies focus on substantial individual and group counseling, specialized clinical interventions, closely monitored medication therapy, and other treatments, plus a basic academic component that enables the student to keep up with his or her studies, often requiring one-on-one instruction and the latest instructional technologies.

The average stay is four to twelve months, sometimes preceded by hospitalization or a wilderness program experience and followed by carefully designed after-care (often a therapeutic boarding school). Due to their clinical intensity and small size (10 to 40 beds), RTCs are more expensive than other residential programs. Treatment-resistant students often can do well in an RTC setting.

The National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs lists 67 accredited RTCs in the United States. All of these are designed to deal with specific, serious emotional distress and/or acting out, but they vary greatly in philosophy and approach.

Some are more behavioral than others; some emphasize the peer culture over individual treatment; some are larger and have a more institutional feel, while others are intimate and clearly relationship-based; some structure their treatment around a physical activity such as equine therapy, while others take a very narrow counseling approach. Some are gender-specific, others are co-ed. Because of this variability, it is imperative that choosing a particular RTC be done very carefully.

How would an international school or a parent determine that a residential treatment center is an option for consideration? The answer

is not simple. In most cases it is the non-academic flags that indicate the intensity of the situation. Ascertaining the psychological/psychiatric root of whatever maladaptive behavior shows itself is best left to the professionals. In cases where help is needed, usually in response to a crisis or following ineffective treatment, the services of an educational placement consultant, trained in and knowledgeable about issues regarding struggling teens, is vital.

The consultant will work with the parents, child, therapist/counselor, and international school to plot a course that will begin to identify the root causes of the youngster's difficulties and recommend a setting that will address them. Only an experienced, specialized educational placement consultant can ensure that the delicate balance between academics, therapy, and social context matches the student's, and the family's, needs. This is not routine stuff.

Let us consider a hypothetical example. Carol was a Grade 9 student with a history of poor academic performance. Teachers and counselors had noted her high level of anxiety and disengagement from school. Physically, she looked unwell, extremely thin and often nervous, shaky, gaunt, and with blood-shot eyes. Her parents were aware of these indicators, but they both traveled a lot and did not seem concerned.

After winter break, everything "popped." She was found by her parents coughing up blood, and was taken to the hospital; the doctors reported that the lung trauma was a result of crack cocaine abuse. Very quickly, it became apparent that

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